Interpretative Dubbing: The Voice Stars in the 1980s China

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A thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in International Studies

University of Washington

2017

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Abstract

Dubbing as Interpretation: The Voice Stars in the 1980s China

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The thesis is a study of the voice actors' reading of foreign films in the late 1970s and 1980s China. The specific group of voice actors who achieved stardom constitutes the subject of this study. By delving into the professional and personal experiences of the voice actors, the thesis theorizes the group of voice actors as an "interpretative community" possessing regular reading strategies and practices as a result of their similar social position. To account for the voice actors'

patterned reading of foreign films, I consider two layers of the identity of being a voice actor in the cultural and social context in 1980s China, that is, state employee and celebrity, and juxtapose the reading of the voice actors with those of the official and the public. In other words, I contemplate questions such as what it was like in working as state-employee and celebrity, and how the two layers of identity affect the voice actors' interpretation of foreign films. Accordingly, the thesis is divided into two parts with the first part looking at the voice actors' subversion of and compliance with the official narrative of foreign films, and the second part examining the interaction between the public and the voice stars.

Journal articles and (auto-) biographies written by the voice actors and interviews in which they participated consist of the major sources for analysis in this study. I also highlight the dubbing style of the voice actors as expressive and constitutive of their reading of foreign films. It is through examining these written and audiovisual materials that I discern the limitation and freedom of interpretation within a politically ambivalent regime, attribute the popularity of the voice actors to Chinese people's cultural orientation towards the West, economic transition, and distinctive celebrity culture in the early 1980s China, and demonstrate interwoven relations among the voice actors, the public, and the officials.

The study is intended to inspire and promote further research into issues that are critical in understanding contemporary and historical cinema across the world, such as the multiple actors engaged in the dubbing industry, the role of translation in transnational films, and the possibility of agency in working in a politically ambiguous environment.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Yomi Braester and Prof. Jennifer M. Bean from the Department of Comparative Literature, Cinema and Media, and Prof. Ann Anagnost from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Washington (UW) for their genuine support and invaluable comments on this thesis. Particularly, I would like to thank Prof. Braester for introducing me to this fascinating field of Cinema and Media Studies, having me to be part of his congenial and supportive community of research, and referring me to resources that would otherwise be inaccessible. I'm also grateful to have taken class with Prof. Bean and Prof. Anagnost, who are inspiring lecturers as well as gracious mentors that show sincere care for students.

I would like to thank China Studies program at the Jackson School of International Studies at UW, which have provided me with opportunities to explore my academic interest and to access resources beyond the departmental boundary.

My gratitude also goes to the group of graduate students working with Prof. Braester, especially Ellen Chang, Belinda Qian He, Lihong Xu, for both their constant encouragement and insights and expertise on film studies from which I have benefited enormously. I also want to thank my dearest friends Xiyang Liu, Ling Liu, Ying-Hsiu Chou, Tianlang Gao for their unfailing support throughout my period of study and process of researching and writing this thesis.

I would like to acknowledge the scholars whose work I have referred to in my thesis. Without their rigid research efforts, the thesis would not be possible.

Finally, I must express my profound gratitude to my family members whose financial and emotional support I feel greatly indebted to along the way.

DEDICATION

To my family

INTRODUCTION

In November 2014, the fifth floor of Shanghai Film Museum was full of people. The national dubbing actress Su Xiu 苏秀 and her friends were staging a forum for diehard fans of Shanghai Dubbing Studio from across the country. In the opening remarks, Su Xiu posed a question: "I'm very confused… People are telling me that nobody watches dubbed films (*yizhipian* 译制片) now…[but] when Li Zi 李梓 [another famous dubbing actress] passed away early this year, the news hit headlines of many newspapers… my books on my past dubbing experience get reprinted despite the depressed book market. I don't know why people no longer care about the dubbing industry, yet at the same time, terribly miss us, these old voice actors." [1]

Su Xiu was referring to the group of voice actors that became widely known in the late 1970s and 1980s China. They worked at major state-owned dubbing studios including Shanghai Dubbing Studio(*Shanghai Dianying Yizhichang* 上海电影译制厂), Dubbing Unit of Changchun Film Studio(*Changchun dianying zhipianchang yizhipian fenchang* 长春电影制片厂译制片分厂), and August First Film Studio (*Bayi dianying zhipian chang* 八一电影制片厂), etc.. Notably, the most popular voice actors such as Qiu Yuefeng 邱岳峰, Bi Ke 毕克, Li Zi, Cao Lei 曹雷, Liu Guangning 刘广宁, Tong Zirong 童自荣, Ding Jianhua 丁建华 were exclusively from

[1] Si Su 苏丝, "Suxiu Qiu Yuefengm Tong Zirong, Liu Guangning Shidai de yizhipian haihui zaixianma?" 苏秀邱岳峰童自荣刘广宁时代的译制片还会再现吗？(Will the dubbed film era of Su Xiu, Qiu Yuefeng, Tong Zirong Recur?), *The Paper*, Nov. 11 (2014), http://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1277198.

Shanghai Dubbing Studio, which was undoubtedly the most celebrated compared with other studios.

While most of the voice actors who work in the dubbing industry today remain anonymous and most foreign films rather have celebrities to dub for characters because of their commercial appeal, the prominence of this group of voice actors was unique to the historical context in the late 1970s and early1980s China, and their dubbing performances have since etched into the memory of Chinese people and continue to be visited today.

The thesis is a study of this group of voice actors' reading of foreign films in that era by situating it in relations with those of the official and the public. The English word "reading" could find two basic correspondences in Chinese in dictionaries. One is *nian* 念, and the other is *du* 读. While *nian* often indicates the action of saying aloud the words of written or printed matter, *du* differs from *nian*'s rigid following of the text and associates itself with a more active engagement with the text. With this distinction in mind, I use the term "reading" with an emphasis on its meaning of *du* in this study to indicate the voice actors' operation on foreign films. Voice actors are only the most salient members of a translation team working on dubbing foreign films. They work with professional translators in studying and translating the diegetic dialogues. Instead of being solely subject to visual information, voice actors highlight verbal communications in the films. The translated script from the professional translators constitutes the foundation of their understanding of foreign films. Therefore, on one hand, they are key in the (re-) making of sound films in rendering the films audible through reading out translated scripts to replace original soundtracks. On the other hand, instead of simply reading aloud (*nian*) and mindlessly following the scripts, their dubbing performance is an interpretative process in

which they assiduously analyze and represent the oral and visual information in the films. So the *du* kind of "reading", with its emphasis on language, critical analysis and interpretation, is used in this study to denote voice actors' activities on the foreign films. Furthermore, reading is a highly socialized activity, in the sense that in order to discern and explicate the voice actors' specific reading practice, the political, cultural and economic contexts, within which the voice actors were deeply embedded, will be examined.

Most studies of voice actors revolve around a technical axis, discussing what techniques voice actors use to deliver a satisfactory performance and how with the help of technology, they successfully portray voices for characters in foreign films, which otherwise would be inaccessible to a specific group of audience.[2] These studies universally focus on voice actors as an integral part of the production branch of film industry, with the consideration that foreign films have to go through a translation process after imported and before they make their debut to big screens.[3]

However, this study is interested in emphasizing voice actors as readers of foreign films, that is, interpreters and expounders of the visual and oral signs in foreign films. Studying voice actors from a production perspective often posits that voice actors are transparent information

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[2] See, for instances, Chunmei Zhao, "Translation into Chinese of Film Scripts and Scripts of TV Drama Series - Four Main Conflicting Demands" 论译制片翻译中的四对主要矛盾, *Chinese Translators Journal* 中国翻译, 2002(04); Meiping Chai, "Strategies for Dealing with Dubbing and Subtitling Synchronization in Film Translation 配音与字幕声画同步翻译的策略", *Shandong Foreign Languages Journal* 山东外语教学, 2003(05).

[3] Not all foreign films are translated by professional dubbing studios. In the Chinese context, some foreign films in the early years of Cultural Revolution era were shown without translation, because they were deemed by the Chinese leaders as too sensitive and inappropriate to be seen even by the translation crew from studios. Because only a small number of central leaders had access to the films, they sometimes had them translated in film theaters by interpreters.

deliverers. However, it is problematic to assume that voice actors follow the original intentions and equally so to assume that there are authorial intents inherent in the films. After all, they are in fact actors. Therefore, what they do is performative. In other words, preconceived notions about writers would constrain productive and effective reading activities and the essential meaning of a work should depend on the readers. The diversion from authorship draws our attention to the readers of the texts. Therefore, rather than taking the voice actors' reproduction of the foreign works as dependent on the original foreign films, I regard their post-production activities including deliberation on word choices before dubbing, expressive dubbing performance, and comments on the films after release, as major sites manifesting their understanding of foreign films. Therefore, the dubbing style of the voice actors, along with the voice actors' interviews and published articles on the foreign films, constitute the bulk of the sources for this study.

The theoretical position taken in the book is close to Janice A. Radway' s discussions in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (2009). In the book, she claims that the meaning construction process is not hung upon the intrinsic messages or the textual features of the work but rather takes place in an interpretation process.[4] While it is true that interpretations of a text can be as many as individual viewers bring to it, Radway further observes:

> Whatever the theoretical possibility of an infinite number of readings, in fact, there are patterns or regularities to what viewers and readers bring to texts in large part because they acquire specific cultural competencies as a consequence of their particular social location. Similar readings are produced…because similarly located readers learn a similar set of reading strategies and interpretive codes that they bring to bear upon the texts they encounter.[5]

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[4]Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (2)* (Chapel Hill, US: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

[5] Ibid., 8.

Therefore, the meaning of the foreign films is found in the reading of the voice actors, which is further based on their specific social location in the cultural context. In fact, one of the original inspirations for this thesis is the similar response the voice actors gave when they were talking about foreign films. They constantly claimed their "faithfulness" to the original films, refused to stereotype characters, and empathized with the experiences in the films. Notably, these claims are exclusively related with their profession as voice actor. Therefore, I seek to account for the patterned and regularized answers of the voice actors by resorting to the explanatory construct of the correlation between social location and reading.

In this sense, the study shares a similar concern with Stanley Fish, who developed the notion of "interpretative community". For Fish, an "interpretative community" possesses specific interpretative strategies in reading texts as a result of a set of cultural assumptions. The cultural context often includes but is not limited to authorial intent.[6] However, Fish builds his idea of "interpretative community" on accounts for modes of literary criticism within the academy, that is, interpretations produced by Freudian, Jungian, or Marxist critics. To expand this notion of "interpretive community" to accommodate the complexity of social groups, I employ this term to account for the lived experience of the voice actors in the late 1970s and early 1980s China and attempt to determine whether the voice actors operate on foreign films as an interpretative community in some ways different from other communities, such as the general public and the official.

To theorize the group of voice actors as an interpretive community that employs reading strategies different from the public and official does not claim a non-normative (or non-

[6] Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text in This Class* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1980), 147–174.

mainstream) situation, but emphasizes on its unique social position of both possibility and resistance. Admittedly, studying the practice of a community inevitably brings up the question about their relationship with the normative/mainstream discourses sanctioned by the official. And scholarly interests are often paid to the official suppression of any non-conformist voice and possible rebellion. However, while the voice actors' interpretative strategies are neither markedly rebellious in the traditional sense of transgressing law or defying authority, nor is their reading comfortably contained in the official narrative. In such case, the interpretative community of the voice actors participate in creating a space that complicate the dichotomy between the "mainstream" and "nonmainstream", as well as the "official" and "unofficial".

Moreover, to suggest a group of people as a community necessarily recognizes them as sharing some identities in common. As the central concern of cultural studies, identity is not merely expressive, but also constitutive of the social and practical life. The constitutive process, according to Stuart Hall, is shaped by prevailing social norms, institutions, subject positions, and particular struggles against those would-be determinants. Identity becomes a positional concept rather than a signification of a stable core of self: "identities are thus points of temporary attachment to subject positions which discursive practices construct for us." [7]

To capture the relativist position of identity, Hall employs the term "conjuncture" to denote that everything exists simultaneously amid specific historical forces in process and amid specific determinant structures. In line with Hall's sociological concerns, identity studies usually use sociological variables such as age, gender, race, and class as the major manifestations of the identity "conjuncture". In the sense, voice acting, standing out as a profession, seems to be less

[7] Hall Stuart, "Who needs 'identity'?". *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Eds. Hall Stuart and Du Gay (London: Sage, 1996). 6.

stable and hard to specify membership. However, like age, gender, and race, profession is essentially a category constituted by social forces. By examining and dissecting what being a voice actor means in the specific context of 1970s and1980s China, we are able to open up a fruitful space where the nuances and implications of this term can be articulated. Moreover, introducing voice acting as a possible dimension for identity expression and constitution is an attempt to refuse preset categories and proliferate the heterogeneous possibilities in identity studies.

Two dimensions of the professional identity of voice actors are sifted out and used in this study to build the arc of the argument. The voice actors will be discussed in terms of their role as state employee and celebrity, which respectively attend to their reading of foreign films in relation with the official and the public. Accordingly, the study will be divided into two parts, each addressing the voice actors' reading of foreign films, its social, cultural relation with the other two groups' reading, and its larger implications in the Chinese context and the agency of voice actors in general.

In the first part, the community of voice actors in the 1970s and 1980s China will be looked at as state employees. The dubbing studios the voice actors worked with such as Shanghai Dubbing Studio and Changchun Dubbing Studio were exclusively state-owned enterprises. The close relationship with the state, especially in the immediate post-Cultural Revolution context, often meant they had to carry out the official orders and be subject to the state censorship. In that era, China Film Corporation (now China Film Group Corporation), who was the sole agency responsible for distribution and exhibition, was also a state-owned enterprise. The foreign films

were imported and later assigned by China Film Corporation to the Dubbing Studios[8]. Because the foreign films the voice actors worked with often contained "inappropriate", "capitalist" scenes and plots and had to be cut before the public watched the films, the studio staff, including the voice actors, had to perform self-censorship before they sent the films to China Film Corporation for distribution in order to ensure that translated films be released to the public and their efforts not be in vain.

However, it would be oversimplified to regard people working within state institutions as meekly complicit with the party-state and lacking oppositional attitudes. In fact, a close look at the voice acting of the people will find that their voices were not just a monolithic copy of the state propaganda. On one hand, it is undeniable that they carried out the official orders and censored foreign films, and their opinions on foreign films, widely distributed on the newspapers, stuck to the principle of political correctness. On the other hand, they consciously or unconsciously sought to adjust or change the official narrative, and their reading, as manifested in dubbing performance, often belied their half-hearted subscription to the official ideas. Therefore, their relations with the state cannot be glossed simply as either submission or rebellion. Though I am not claiming the value of voice actors' work should be measured in terms of social resistance, it points to the heterogeneity even within a seemingly heavily politically controlled territory.

The dubbing performance of the voice actors has been widely celebrated and they became stars in the late 1970s and 1980s. The celebrity status introduced a public sphere. To some extent, the voice actors share commonalities with intellectuals in that they both possess specialized skills, gained authority as a result, and exercised public engagement in writing for the

[8] George Stephen Semsel. *Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People's Republic* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1987), 3.

general audience and giving commentaries on questions inflected with public concerns. However, instead of being viewed as intellectuals who often elevate themselves from the public as a result of their professional credentials and privileged social status, the voice actors align themselves more with the public in reading the foreign films. Evidences could be found in their description of the content and affective attitude towards the films. The differences and similarities between the reading of the public and the voice actors result from their interactive mechanism and constitute the basis to understand the stardom of the voice actors.

The consideration of stardom attends to the material world. The voice actors' work could be seen as constituting a market and a career. The success of voice actors could be viewed as a result of the quality control mechanism introduced by the market that sifts out good services. Thus, when we speak to the material surroundings of voice actors and read their response to foreign films as an answer to the market, we consider the affinity between the public opinions and the voice actors' views. Specifically, to answer what was the relation between the voice actors' reading of foreign films and that of the public, I consider a set of questions, including what role did dubbing play in people's fascination with foreign films? Why did voice actors achieve celebrity status and emerge from behind the screen? And what made the voice actors legible, suitable for desire and identification?

Finally, the claim that the voice actors share common identities does not entail that the group of voice actors was homogenous. On the contrary, it is an internally diverse group with each member asserting his or her singularity, not only in terms of age and gender, but also in terms of their working experience, passion for the industry, and career-related personal tragedies. Therefore, personal stories of specific voice actors are the cornerstone upon which the generalized claims on their reading are built in this study.

To consider the reading of the voice actors in conjunction with the official and the public serves to eschew any totalitarian attempt to assign it into one or the other and seeks to negotiate a limited space between the two sides that are often posited to be polar opposites. In studying the modern Chinese drama, Chen Xiaomei claims that for a play to succeed in the post-Maoist era, it has to have an apparent official framework, which allows it to pass the censor, and most importantly, it also has a subtext that is both subordinate to and subversive of the official text.[9] In this regard, like the drama, dubbed films always had to please both the guardians of the official ideology and the members of its audience who are often attracted to the unfamiliar and the unofficial. Only by meeting these contrary demands can a dubbed film become a public event. The voice actors, as the essential agents in the popularity of dubbed films, played a key role in implementing the contradictory demands of both the market and the state, and in negotiating the limited cultural space in the borderland between the official and the anti-official, the public and the private.

It is hoped that through the exploration of the reading of the voice actors of foreign films in the 1980s China, the study will aid in the understanding and appreciation of many ways in which the group of voice actors had challenged or complied with the official representations of imported cultural practice, and had interacted with the public reception in the post-Maoist era. Most importantly, the study is intended to inspire and promote further discussion and future analysis of issues beyond the Chinese historical context, including, but not limited to, agency of voice actors in transnational/national sound cinema, limitation and freedom of interpretation within a politically ambivalent environment, and cultural invention in translational practice.

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[9] Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the "Right" Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 162.

CHAPTER 1 Articulating Anti-Voices

I think I can understand that Chinese intellectuals are so determined to get political affirmation and innocence, and even see those as more important than their lives.

–Su Xiu mentioning Qiu Yuefeng's suicide in "Partners in My Dubbing Career "[10]

Xiaomei Chen in *Acting the "Right" Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (2002) argues that the word "reception" usually meant, particularly in early post-Maoist China period, "the official stamp of approval for the political content of the text" in the critical discourse of Chinese literary history and dramatic studies.[11] It is vastly different from the meaning of "reception" in the West, which accounted by literary scholars such as Stanley Fish as diverse reading communities with changing horizons of literary expectations employing various interpretative strategies. Chen's argument points to the dominance of the official ideology in constructing the reception narrative in the post-Maoist period, but nevertheless, alerted us to the possibilities under the official umbrella, including those viewpoints that are excluded from or marginalized by official records.

In this chapter, I attend to the viewpoints of the voice actors of foreign films in relation with the official position. What was the possible subversive reading of the voice actors against the official? How did the voice actors' identity as state employee factor in their reading? And would working inside state institutions embolden or restrict their creativity and agency?

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[10]Su Xiu 苏秀. "Wo peiyin shengya zhong de huoban" 我配音生涯中的伙伴(Partners in My Dubbing Career), *Culture and History Vision* 文史博览, March 2006, 16-20.

[11] Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the "Right" Part,* 186.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the voice actors' reading, a brief explanation of the methodology employed to locate anti-official subtexts in the reading of voice actors seems in order. In contemporary Chinese society, an anti-official subtext would by definition not be readily available, as any written document in newspapers or journals is subject to official scrutiny before coming out. A few cases that successfully elude the censorship or are deemed innocuous at first may attract public attention that is better wired to sense subversive elements, and subsequently censored. No publication is ever politically safe. Given the subtleties and complexities of the political situation, one seems bound to follow the account of the official history. However, to gauge the voice actors' reading of the foreign films and spot traces that unsettled the official account, I resort to whatever clues I could discover in the press, most of which were cloaked in the voice actors' professionalism. In these stories, the confrontation the voice actors launched against the officials was justified in the name of preserving aesthetic values of foreign films. Above all else, I draw upon the dubbing performance of the voice actors as indicative of their counteraction and indispensable in reconstructing the voice actors' reading of foreign films. Dubbing performance is the essential component of the dubbed films. It is not the same as the film text that often only takes into consideration the film scenes and sequences. Moreover, performance studies have emphasized that performance should not be understood as merely mimicking a text but as independent in its own right. Studying Shakespeare' plays, Pamela Bickley and Jenny Stevens assert actors exercise their own choices in performance because no "authentic" editions of any one of Shakespeare's plays survive. The Shakespearean texts have always been subject to modification from acting company, professional scribe, stage alteration, etc. out of consideration of artistic desirability or mere expedience.[12] Furthermore, the

[12] Pamela Bickley and Jenny Stevens, *Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama: Text and*

intervention and mediation of cinematic technology and technicians also challenge to some extent notions of the actor's control of their own screen performance. The performances of the actors are under multiple influences that cannot be attributed to a single written text.

Film scholars also have been involved in highlighting the significance of performance, and have viewed the language, expressions, intonation, pitch pattern, among other elements in performance as important sites that produce meaning. Emerging out of mise-en-scène criticism, Andrew Klevan produced textual analysis of moments from films in painstaking detail.[13] With a sophisticated command of language, he translates the acting in the film into written prose. By attending to gestures, expressions that to most people might seem trivial, incidental or banal, his prose manages to reanimate and invest the film texts with meaning and pleasure. Similarly, Paul MacDonald, in his essay "Why Study Film Acting", argues that analysis of film acting remains crucial to understanding the meaning and affective power of movies. He asserts that "through attention to the mircromeanings of the voice and body, it becomes possible to find in the very smallest of details the most significant moments."[14]

In a word, these observations point out the fact that any written text, however important or interesting, is empty without the transformation of the actors' performance. Therefore, a textual analysis of foreign films is not sufficient in the study of the voice actors, not only because the voice actors did not participate in the creation of foreign film scripts but also because performance studies requires a different mode of inquiry that highlights the creative agency of

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Performance (London, New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare), viii.

[13] Andew Klevan, *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation Andrew Klevan* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 104.

[14] Paul MacDonald, "Why Study Film Acting?: Some Opening Reflections," in *More Than a Method: Trends and Translations in Contemporary Screen Performance*, eds, Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson, and Frank P. Tomasulo (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004) , 40.

actors. The minor details in performance are exuberantly rich in meaning, which cannot be overlooked.

"Disinfection" and Disaffection

Many foreign films that were released in the late 1970s and 1980s had been imported and dubbed during the Cultural Revolution. During that era, foreign films were made available only to a small audience. Usually, only Jiang Qing and her colleagues in the Cultural Revolution Central Committee Film Subcommittee, residents of military compounds, government compounds, and film studio employees had access to these films.[15] The films were classified as "films for internal reference" (*neicanpian* 内参片) aimed at providing "information about the new trend of international class struggle to the Proletariat Headquarter" (*gong wuchanjieji silingbu liaojie guoji jiejidouzheng xindongxiang* 供无产阶级司令部了解国际阶级斗争新动向) and role models the Model Theater can imitate.[16]

When most of the country was still entwined in class struggle, and artistic work units and film studios halted production to make socialist revolution, Shanghai Dubbing Studio became officially designated to translate the internal reference films in 1970. The privileged access to the internal reference films provided the voice actors with first-handed experience with unofficial

[15] Carlos Rojas and Eileen Cheng-yin Chow, "Form: Maoist Film", *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 272.

[16] Chuanmin Yang 杨传敏, "Shanghai dianying yizhichang: yige guojia shengyin de mishi" 上海电影译制厂：一个国家声音秘史 (*Shanghai Dubbing Studio: a Secret History of a Nation*), *Southern Metropolis Entertainment Weekly*, September 2009.

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texts. Indeed, the banning of foreign films to the public and the increased popularity that ensued after the end of the ban confirmed that foreign films had the potential to imperil the official canon and were indeed subversive communications in the Cultural Revolution era. As state employees, the voice actors were entrusted with the highly sensitive tasks of accessing unofficial material and expected to scrupulously stick to the state ideology. However, we find that in lieu of unquestionable allegiance, dubbing foreign films opened up a sphere where the voice actors frequently crossed the borderland between the official ideology and the open, albeit limited, anti-official space permitted by that ideology.

Concerned about the subversive potential the films might cause, the central authority instructed that all the staff involved in the dubbing work had to carry out "great criticism" (*dapipan* 大批判) after completing the translation of each film. This process was called "disinfection"(*xiaodu*, 消毒), to clear the poisonous influence of foreign films. The criticism had to be written into reports to be submitted to the higher-level officials. Workers' Mao Zedong's Thought Propaganda Team (*gongren Mao Zedong sixiang xuanchuan dui* 工人毛泽东思想宣传队) also participated in the criticism meeting, which served as de facto surveillance.

Nevertheless, the voice actors found the criticisms hypocritical and meaningless. Sun Yufeng 孙渝烽, director and voice actor of dubbed films at that time concluded that all the criticism followed the same pattern–the films were promoting capitalist lifestyle and supremacy of love; they whitewashed capitalism and imperialism; they poisoned the masses and advocated class reconciliation; the female characters were serpents morphing into beauties. The summarization of criticism patterns is not without judgment. It shows that the voice actors found

the criticisms boring and stale, if not discreditable. Instead of swallowing grievances, the voice actors decided to reuse the same criticism report every time and change only the character names and film title to cope with the official instructions. More directly, the voice actor Pan Woyuan 潘我源 once complained: "reiterating the same thing every day is so annoying–why don't we save the time to practice our dubbing skills?"[17] Interestingly, the reason the voice actors used to reject the "disinfection" was not that they found the criticism wrong but that it would prevent them from spending more time in improving their professional skills. Indeed, professionalism or the devotion to their job became the theme they kept visiting, utilizing, and playing with, whenever they found a difference with the official opinions. Voice acting was the place where they could assert their agency and source an authority that enabled them to stand against the dry, official instruction of mindless criticism.

Perception and Performance

The minor trick and perfunctory attitude against the official discourse are just prologue to the perceptible counteraction from the voice actors, which was more fiercely asserted through their hands-on professional experience. Through dubbing performance, they identified with the characters and compassionately elucidated the film plots in every way that the officials would frown upon.

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[17] Yufeng Sun 孙渝烽. "Nanian tou, zheyang yizhi 'neicanpian'" 那年头, 这样译制"内参片" (We Translate 'Films For Internal Reference' at that Time), *Shanghai Wave*, April 2013, 65-67.

The voice actors from Shanghai Dubbing Studio are usually termed into two generations.[18] The first generation of voice actors refers to the people who joined the studio in the 50s and 60s. They worked through the Cultural Revolution period and reached the apogee of their career in the late 1970s and 1980s. Among them, Qiu Yuefeng, Bi Ke, Su Xiu, Fu Ruisheng, Li Zi, Zhao Shenzhi, Liu Guangning were the most prominent. The second generation of Shanghai voice actors refers to people who began to work at the dubbing studio in the late 70s, including Qiao Zhen, Tong Zirong, Ding Jianhua, and Cao Lei. The second generation was largely inspired and influenced by the first generation. While the first generation landed the dubbing profession often by accident, the second generation was mostly well-trained college graduates majoring in Performance and Theater Studies.

The years of Cultural Revolution had severely impacted on the first generation of the voice actors. Though Shanghai Dubbing studio reopened as early as in 1970 to dub the internal reference films, the early years of the revolution still wrought huge havoc on the studio. In this early period, the production of translated films was a highly centralized planning model and underwent unprecedented political examination and control. The goal of the film dubbing industry was to promote the country's political ideology and consolidate the regime. Working intimately with foreign films, the dubbing studios across the country had been accused for being heavily influenced by the capitalist West and smeared as "big black nests" (*daheiwo* 大黑窝) of capitalism and revisionism. The studio staff were denounced as the dehumanizing "cow-demons and snake-spirits" (*niugui sheshen* 牛鬼蛇神). In 1966, Shanghai Dubbing Studio was renamed "Shanghai Revolutionary Film Translation Studio of Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers"*(Shanghai*

[18] I have not found a specific authority that is responsible for the division, but the voice actors are frequently mentioned in media in generational terms.

gong-nong-bing geming dianying yizhichang 上海工农兵革命电影译制厂). Most of the translators, directors, and actors were forced to receive re-education in May Seventh Cadre Schools, and some were sent to prison without valid reasons.

Qiu Yuefeng was one of the voice actors whose life had been deeply affected by the political turmoil. During the Cultural Revolution, because of anecdotal reasons, he was declared a counterrevolutionary and sent to the cow-shed (*niupeng* 牛棚) for re-education.[19] The political burden on the voice actor foreshadowed his suicide and meanwhile, ironically gave impetus to his artistic achievement.

In 1971, Shanghai Dubbing Studio received the order from the officials to translate the British feature film *Jane Eyre* (1970). The studio head Chen Xuyi decided to have Qiu dub the male protagonist Rochester. However, the proposal was objected to by the propaganda team who were leading the art production at that time, because they thought Qiu was under surveillance and thus his participation in making internal reference films would have been inappropriate. But at Chen's insistence, Qiu was eventually released from monitored labor work in a carpentry workshop and resumed his dubbing work.[20] In the end, it turned out that *Jane Eyre* became one of Qiu's masterpieces.

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[19] There are many versions of story to account for why Qiu was wearing "the hat of historical problem" during the Cultural Revolution. Some claim that it was because Qiu has a Belarusian mother and he looks like a foreigner; some argue that it was due to the characters he dubbed are all villains, thus his mind was thought to be heavily poisoned; others had the story that Qiu cooperated with KMT in killing Communists before the Liberation.

[20]Yufeng Sun. "Peiyin dashi Qiu Yuefeng shuohua Luoqiesite" 配音大师邱岳峰"说活"罗切斯特(Dubbing Master Qiu Yuefeng Makes Alive Rochester), *Laodong Daily* 劳动报. July 11, 2013.

Most of Qiu's dubbing works were focused on non-entities and villains such as the robber in the Italian Neorealist film *Cops and Robbers* (1951) and Monsieur Verdoux in *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947). But the character Rochester in *Jane Eyre* was an exception because unlike Qiu's other dubbed characters, Rochester could not be easily labeled as good or bad and also because the character was much richer for interpretation as the hero in the story, with complex storylines revolving around him. After it was released to the public in 1979, *Jane Eyre* gained great popularity and Qiu became well remembered as the voice of Rochester. In response to the public craze for the film, Qiu Yuefeng wrote an open letter in a newspaper, in which he thanked the support of the audience and addressed his understanding of Rochester:

> Through specific lines, one carefully studies the "emotion" of the actor in the original film, and uses it as a basis for his/her dubbing. Take Rochester in *Jane Eyre* for instance. He is an "elusive" character. Actually, his improbable hauteur and fickle surliness are only his appearance. What is hidden inside is a huge pain–his unfortunate life experience. It is the pain that drives him to hate and be contemptuous to others, to make him appear ruthless and tyrannical. Dubbing cannot simply imitate the appearance, but more importantly should convey the "emotion". If I only represent his surliness, people would lose sympathy for Rochester and misunderstand the figure. Mastering the appropriateness (or faithfulness to the original film) determines the success of the dubbing performance[21].

Qiu's reading of Rochester alludes to his personal sufferings during the Cultural Revolution. Much like Rochester, the hidden pain caused by the political persecution haunted Qiu's life and made him relate deeply to the character he dubbed. One of the most important reasons why he committed suicide in the end of his life was also believed to be the political injustice he had suffered. His reading of the character draws a distinction from the stereotypical heroes and villains portrayed by the Model Operas (*yangbenxi* 样板戏) and the Old Three War

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[21] Yi Qi 铱杞, "Yizhipian: taiqian muhou de shijie" 译制片:台前幕后的世界 (Dubbed films: the World Behind the Screen), *Popular Cinema* 大众电影, No.15 (2005): 52.

Films (*laosanzhan* 老三战) in the Cultural Revolution era. While *Jane Eyre*, as an internal reference film from a Western capitalist country, was supposed to be treated critically if not branded as outright antirevolutionary, the profuse emotion and compassion Qiu infused into Rochester demonstrate his empathy with his character and a refusal to interpret him according to the prevailing black or white mode in domestic cinema or the official line that had been suppressing personal emotions.

Qiu's disobedience with the official discourses is further illustrated by his dubbing performances of villains and marginalized characters, which as mentioned early, constitute the majority of Qiu's works. In the immediate post-Cultural Revolution period, he dubbed Dōtō Masayasu in *Manhunt* (1976), Colonel Huerta in *Zorro* (1975) and a waiter and a client at a brothel in *Waterloo Bridge* (1940), to name just a few. However marginalized or morally reprehensible these characters are in the films, Qiu approached them with empathy. In all the works of nonentities, he emphasized the helplessness and bitterness of robber, presented a sinister and ruthless Dōtō, and delivered an unfeeling Colonel Huerta. Each character received unique treatment in his dubbing performance with varying voice depictions of different speeds, pitch patterns, and intonations.

Dōtō Masayasu is arguably the second most well-known character Qiu had dubbed and *Manhunt* was unarguably the most popular film in the late 1970s. *Manhunt* was dubbed in 1978 when the country was just beginning to officially denounce the revolutionary discourses and gradually take steps to "uncap" all the rightists.[22] The popularity of the film resulted from the

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[22]People's Daily, "Yixiang zhongda de wuchuan jieji zhengce" 一项重大的无产阶级政策(A Significant Proletarian Policy), Nov. 17, 1978.

timing as well as the theme, plot, and characterization in the film, which spoke to the feelings of the Chinese people in early post-Maoist China.

The film tells the story that the prosecutor Morioka (Ken Takakura) is falsely accused of rape and robbery and goes on the run to clear his name. In the opening sequence of the film, Morioka is pointed at to be a robber in a café in Tokyo. After he is taken into the police officer, another witness comes to charge him of theft. In the opening minutes of the film, Morioka transitioned from a prosecutor to a criminal. The trumped-up charge was reminiscent of the injustice Chinese people had just experienced in the ten-year disaster of Cultural Revolution. Qiu, who dubbed Dōtō Masayasu, also related deeply to the accumulation of false allegations. The climactic scene from the film was when the character Dōtō tempts Marioka to jump from a high-rise building. Qiu thoroughly portrayed the sanctimony of the character Dōtō. He handled the dubbing in a seductive and deadly way that reminded people of the figure of the femme fatale in film noir. Through the dubbing, we could be assured that Qiu managed to achieve his ideal dubbing, that is, to master the complex emotions in a character. Meanwhile, he also articulated the long-harbored sadness and grievances accumulated in his life experience through the mouth of the character.

The dubbing performance of Qiu in *Manhunt* announces a venture into an area that had been forbidden. At that time, the injustice in the age of Mao had not yet been fully rectified. Not until January 1979 did the party begin to restore citizens' rights to landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, and "bad elements" in the countryside.[23] These categories of people had been deemed as people's enemy and suffered severe class struggles in the Cultural Revolution

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[23] People's Daily, "Shiying qingkuang bianhua de yixiang zhongda juece" 适应情况变化的一项重大决策 (A Significant Decision to Adjust to a New Situation) , Jan. 29, 1979.

period. In May 1979, the officials eventually announced a new policy of rehabilitation. As the dubbed film that came out in 1978, *Manhunt* demonstrates a personal attempt from the voice actor that sought to defy the unjust charges leveled at him and many other people in Cultural Revolution by infusing his feelings into the character and plot in the film. Above all, if Qiu's enthusiastic dubbing performance manifests his identification with Rochester and calls people's attention to the suffering of the character, Qiu's performance of Dōtō Masayasu is latent with denunciation of the regime's political persecution in the Cultural Revolution era. All of these attempts were made through his dubbing performance, i.e. his commitment to the dubbing profession.

Qiu's interpretation of characters blurs the distinction between positive and negative characters conventionally associated with undiluted heroism and clown-type villainy in Chinese cinema. Furthermore, his emphasis on the divergence between the characters' surface and deep-down emotions posits that the voice actor was reading against the official discourses, which embodies an intricate play of power within the official framework. However, if Qiu's reading of foreign films suggests a self-conscious position against the official discourses in the voice actors, Ding Jianhua's reading of foreign films denotes that dubbing the foreign films necessitates a border-crossing activity, because in most cases, reading things subversively was the only way to read meaningfully.

Transition and Transformation

Different from many other voice actors in the second generation, Ding Jianhua did not get trained in university for performance. Ding Jianhua was born in a revolutionary family and both of her parents were in the military. However, during the Cultural Revolution, Ding

Jianhua's parents were branded as rightists and they moved from Shanghai to Xinhai Farm in Congming Island. After the National Entrance Examination was recovered after the Cultural Revolution, Ding Jianhua was admitted to Fudan University. However, Fudan administrators changed their mind after they learned about Ding's family background. After being refused by the university, Ding tried to find a job in video stations and theaters, but those places only recruited young people with "red roots and straight shoots"(*genzhengmiaohong* 根正苗红). Ding Jianhua was rejected repeatedly and the reasons given were often that she was too short to play heroic characters in the shows or she was from a problematic/anti-revolutionary family background.

Eventually, with the help of a teacher, Ding Jianhua took up an examination in Shanghai Dubbing Studio. The judge asked her to read aloud lines from an Albanian engineer who talked about self-reliance of a country and rejection of worshipping foreign powers. Associating with Communist heroes such as Liu Hulan and Sister Jiang in movies she watched in childhood, Ding believed that the engineer must be a European version of Liu Hulan. Thinking in this way, she passed the exam and landed on working in Shanghai Dubbing Studio in 1976.[24] Both the dubbing studio and Ding chose to read foreign films in a familiar and ideological way that compared foreign characters to revolutionary heroes in the communist history, and stayed comfortably within the official discourses about foreign films and state propaganda.

However, after working in the studio for a while, Ding gradually realized something was wrong with her previous interpretation and expressed her confusion. In a letter she wrote back

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[24]Zhi Wang 王志, Zhen Qiao 乔榛 and Jianhua Ding 丁建华. "Shengyin de chuantongli yu hun de zai suzao"声音的穿透力与"魂的再塑造 (The Penetrability of Voice and the Recreation of Spirit), *Popular Cinema,* vol.5 (2006), 34.

home, she stated: “what I am doing now is totally different from what I did in the cultural troupe of the army. Now I have to say things like ‘I love you’, ‘darling’. These words are forbidden in the army, and they are also unusual in theater. After we speak it, we have to criticize them, labeling them as capitalist. But now I think they are not bad things. They show human love. I feel completely different before, during, and after work. While I have to criticize the values of the foreign works after I finish dubbing, I am devoted during the work.”[25] After reading her letter, her father wrote back and urged her to stick to the proletarian thinking when working with the capitalist films.

The letter forcefully demonstrates a transition in Ding’s subjectivity, resulting from a reinterpretation of foreign films after working on them. Though she entered the dubbing industry fully convinced of the official narratives of foreign films and the commonality of socialist spirit in and among artistic productions, the first-hand interaction with foreign films drove her to realize that any attempt to integrate the reading of foreign films into the official narrative was not going to make sense. She questioned the official reading of the film as well as the very nature of the criticism forced by the official instruction. Without the voice actor’s deliberation on turning things upside down, the foreign films communicated with her in a straightforwardly subversive way.

It should be noted that in discussing the foreign films, the voice actors resort to a kind of narrative practice that share a lot of similarity with “speaking bitterness”(*suku* 诉苦). “Speaking bitterness” has taken up by many anthropologists as a political praxis honed and disseminated by

[25]Chuanmin Yang, “*Shanghai Dubbing Studio.”*

the party in the process of revolution.[26] Party cadres used it as a vital method of teaching peasants and later workers how to speak as socialist subjects of the new nation. People who spoke their days in the pre-revolutionary years told highly structured stories that highlighted their suffering before Maoist years and help from the Party to overthrow the repression. "Speaking bitterness" weaves personal experiences into a grand epic that represented the forming of socialist nation and the process of creating socialist subjects.

Resembling "speaking bitterness", the voice actors' recall and descriptions of their past experience in working with foreign films in Maoist years are patterned. Either consciously or unconsciously, they unanimously condemned repression of emotions and limitation of liberation in Maoist time. Therefore, if "speaking bitterness" is the strategy utilized by the Party to mobilize mass population in the revolutionary years, the voice actors' descriptions of their past work experience are used by the post-Mao government as a narrative strategy to discredit the preceding regime, promote its own ideology and legitimacy, and create a myth of a more liberal environment and an image of more tolerant government.

Combat and Conflict

Disobedient traces in the era of Cultural Revolution is easily imaginable, as this period in China was marked by violent class struggle and suppressive regime, the ideology of which was denounced even by the later Chinese government.[27] However, the counteraction of the state

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[26] See, for instance, Lisa Rofel, "Socialist Nostalgia." *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[27] In 1981, the Party declared that the Cultural Revolution was "responsible for the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the country, and the people since the founding of the People's Republic". "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China," adopted by the Sixth Plenary Session of

ideology from the voice actors did not terminate after the end of the Cultural Revolution era– they continued to take opposite positions against the official lines in the early post-Maoist era when the state began to release previously forbidden films to the public and discredit its predecessor for its criticism and condemnation of the foreign texts.

The existence of censorship has been an unalterable fact of life for Chinese directors and actors. As insiders of the state apparatus, the voice actors had access to the whole version of foreign films ensuing their importation. After they finished dubbing for a film, the film would be sent to the censors to decide if certain parts or the whole of the film were inappropriate for the public to view. However restrictively the censorship may exercise its control, the voice actors took risks to confront them directly when they found the official reading unacceptable.

In 1983, the dubbed film *The National Interest* (1978) produced by Shanghai Dubbing Studio won the Ministry of Culture Excellence Film award, the predecessor of the Huabiao Awards. The voice actors Sun Yufeng and Cao Lei, representing the dubbing team of the studio, went to Beijing to receive the award in 1984. In a meeting with the officials from the Ministry of Culture, Sun proposed that the country's censors should consider the viewpoints of dubbing teams before they decided to cut certain scenes from the foreign films. He cited the film *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1965) as an instance – "the scene in which the female slave shows her back has been cut, but I don't think it is necessary because the back is full of strips of whip marks, which will only stimulate in the audience resentment of the slavery system."[28] The direct accusation of

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the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on June 27, 1981. *Resolution on CPC History (1949–81)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981). 32.

[28] Yufeng Sun, "Chen Xuyi, shang hai yizhichang de dianjiren" 陈叙一, 上海电影译制厂的奠基人(Chen Xuyi, the founder of Shanghai Dubbing Studio). *Shanghai Wave*, May 2013, 36.

inappropriate censoring in front of senior officials suggests that the voice actors were not mindlessly following the censors but actively sought to overthrow their understanding.

Though the reason the voice actors gave against the official position still is reminiscent of the class antagonism that permeated Maoist years, the effort to utter their own voice is remarkable. In fact, the voice actors were insightful in wrapping the anti-official discourse in the predominant ideology of the post-Maoist state. The scene should not be cut because it can be served as a critique of the capitalist countries. This type of reasoning made it sound less offensive to the officials. They blended their humanist concerns with the official narrative of critiquing capitalism and made a powerful subversive case. However, when the story was later learned by the studio head Chen Xuyi 陈叙一, he frowned upon the behavior. According to Sun, Chen was worried that the suggestion might infuriate higher officials and negatively affect the operation of the studio.[29] The anemia of state employment sneaks in. Any attempt to rebel would be deemed undesirable if it risks threatening the livelihood of the studio or its employees.

Indeed, working in the state institution means undertaking the tasks assigned by China Film Corporation and counting on the tasks to produce profits for the survival of studio. The studio depended on profits and state subsidies to generate its employees' salaries, welfare and bonus, and other benefits, and to pay tax to the state. In fact, the meager economic return of the voice actors could barely support their basic life needs. In 1984 the academic journal, *Movie Communication* published an article by Sun Yufeng and Cao Lei complaining about the poor living conditions of young voice actors. They listed some figures: Liu Guangning, who came to the Studio in 1960 and was earning only 59.5 yuan a month, and Ding Jianhua was earning only 51 yuan. Even some senior directors earned only 60 yuan per month. These people could not

[29] Ibid..

even afford to buy food(?).[30] Their salaries were merely three quarters of the national average of around 80 yuan according to the report of National Bureau of Statistics of PRC in 1984.[31] Therefore, in order to pay tax and maintain its operation, the studio had to expand its production work beyond the yearly assignment of around thirty foreign films from China Film Corporation and began to dub for domestic films and TV programs, which subsequently caused bitter controversy among audiences at that time.

Therefore, the position the voice actors took in relation with the official discourses has never been an either/or question. Even when the conflicts between their understanding of the films and that of the officials were blatant, they might refuse to confront the official discourses headlong because of considerations such as their own livelihood. However, compared with the easily overlooked defiance in the late Maoist period, the way of proposing direct suggestions to the officials suggests that the voice actors constantly crossed the official line and actively sought to change in the post-Cultural Revolution era when the state seemed to be more lax about their ideology control.

Through the examination of these voice actors' readings of foreign films and their relations with the official discourses, we find a complex yet intimately related paradigm. All of them celebrated the values in the films and demonstrated a reading of foreign films different

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[30] Yufeng Sun, *Nanianyue, women yong shengyin zaomeng– ji yizhipian de ren he shier* 那年月，我们用声音造梦——记译制片配音的人和事儿 (We Create Dreams through Voice at that Time–A Memo Of The Dubbed Films And Voice Actors) (Shanghai: Orient Publishing Center, 2014)，186.

[31] National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, "1984 nian" , November 22, 2001, http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/ndtjgb/qgndtjgb/200203/t20020331_29997.html.

from the official position, through vivification of characters, shift of attitudes, or headlong confrontation. The voice actors' professional credentials consolidate these divergent approaches. In other words, they reform their subjectivities from being voice actors, and use dubbing to voice difference and build up their authority in confronting the officials.

Unlike social activists, the voice actors did not flamboyantly challenge the official structure. They only sought minor adjustment within the framework and elicited recognition from the state. In a way, this suggests the restriction of working in state enterprises. Echoing the opening quote of this chapter, political concerns weighed heavily in their lives, and yet they impressively balanced the victimization in the Cultural Revolution persecution and state employment in the late 1970s and 1980s in working with foreign films. However limited, their reading of foreign films offers an exploration into the space existing between official ideology and anti-official sentiments, which came from the heart and often had to remain unspoken. The voice actors' attitudes and approaches towards the "subversive" ideas of foreign films show the ripples that foreign films had caused in that era. The reading of the voice actors was skillfully expressed through dubbing, echoing the official ideology while simultaneously brewing a voice of dissent.

CHAPTER 2 Star Voice and Voice Star

"If we were living in the twelfth century…, the practitioners of dubbing would be burnt in the marketplace for heresy. Dubbing is equivalent to a belief in the duality of the soul."

—French filmmaker Jean Renoir in *My Life and My Films 1974*[32]

Jean Renoir's comments on dubbing are perhaps the most quoted sentences in the studies of dubbing. His furious accusation of dubbers points to the common association people make between dubbing and aberration, which further alludes to the fact that most dubbed films in English-speaking market are of inferior quality, and deemed as low-brow and mass entertainment.[33]

Despite many people's contempt for dubbed films, a look at the Chinese public's reception of dubbed films in the late 1970s and early 1980s would find the very opposite. Far from being repelled by, people swooned at dubbing art and developed fascination over voice actors. For instance, *Manhunt*, the Japanese film staring Ken Takakura that was translated into China in 1978, became a hit immediately following its release. In Beijing, the film was screened over 2800 times in the single year of 1978, drawing over 27 million people to theater.[34] The remarkable success of the dubbed films was accompanied with the level of interest given to the voice actors who dubbed the films. In an essay published in 1997 in *Comma,* a magazine

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[32] Jean Renoir, *My Life and My Films* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 9.

[33] Shengmei Ma, *East-West Montage: Reflections on Asian Bodies in Diaspora* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 79.

[34] Ji Yu 虞吉. "*Zhongguo Dianying Shi"*中国电影史 (Chinese Film History) (Chongqing: Chongqing University Press, 2011), 130.

sponsored by Jiangshu Writers' Association (*Jiangsusheng zuojia xiehui* 江苏省作家协会), Zhang Yue 张越 recalled her passion for the voice actors at that time:

> I have watched *Manhunt* eight times,..and began to recite the lines.. then I suddenly realized: how could the dubber of Yakumura sound so cold yet so beautiful? Oh, he was Yang Chengchun from Shanghai Dubbing Studio!... I fell into love…and then I began to know Li Zi, Qiu Yuefeng, Shang Hua, Qiao Zhen, Liu Guangning, and so on. What charming voices! What a glamorous world! Since then, I have watched and recited all the dubbed films made by Shanghai Dubbing Studio. Voice actors, regardless of their age or gender, became my lovers. All the characters they had dubbed were also my lovers. I cannot figure our I fell into love with Tong Zirong because of Zorro, or fell into love with Zorro because of Tong..anyway, my heart was filled with love….I have benefited from being their fans all my life. Because of my love for Ana Karenina dubbed by Li Zi, I began to be familiar with Leo Tolstoy; because Qiu Yuefeng dubbed the priest Claude Frollo in *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, I began to read Victor Hugo. Because Sun Daolin dubbed *Hamlet*, I started to recite Shakesphere…I still have autographs from those voice actors with me …to me, they are not only stars, but also guides for me to lead an elegant life. I learn from them romance, elegance, diginity, love, and contempt. They are my spiritual guide and enlightener. I will love them forever.[35]

She accounted the names and stories of the voice actors from Shanghai Dubbing Studio with great affection and reiterated her gratitude and love towards this group of people. Her passion was not uncommon among people from that era. In fact, the fascination towards dubbed films and the voice actors in the 80s China has left indelible imprint on that generation. In an interview with *Southern Metropolis Entertainment Weekly*, the famous playwright Shi Hang 史航 comments that the dubbed films from the 80s formed the "spiritual pedigree"(*Jingshen puxi* 精神谱系) of that generation, causing a "deadly" effect on their values and beliefs on love, career and fate: "those films determined the formation of the present and the path towards the

[35] Yue Zhang 张越, "Zhuixing lushang wo chengchang" 追星路上我成长 (I Grow Up in the Road of Fandom), *Comma* 雨花, March 1997, 50.

present."[36] The profound influence of the voice actors over Chinese people from that era intrigued us to ask: what led to the dubbed films' popularity and their great influence? What was the role of the voice actors in the influence? And more specifically, what were the interactions between the voice actors and the public in their reading of foreign films?

In this chapter, I examine the relations between the reading of voice actors and that of the public, provide a picture of economic and cultural context of the reception of foreign films in that era, and identify the reasons behind the popularity of the voice actors. I argue that the voice actors were complicit with the public in imagining the West in the late 1970s and early 1980s China. Along with the audience, the voice actors held in their mind a mental image of the West, which is discernible from their reading of foreign films (either contained in the unique dubbing performance style or in the form of writing newspaper articles explicating the foreign films). The imagination came into being in the specific economic and cultural context of the late 1970s and early 1980s, which precipitated the prominence of the voice actors and caused them to be subjects of identification.

Reading the Films

To begin with, it is difficult to distinguish the public reading of foreign films from those of the voice actors. In other words, though some minor differences exist, their opinions towards foreign films share striking similarities. The differences between the voice actors' reading and

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[36] Hang Shi 史航, "Zhongguo yinjinpian yizhi yanhua–cong yishupin dao kuaixiaopin" 中国引进片译制演化——从艺术品到快消品(The Evolution of Chinese Film Imports–from Artifacts to Fast Moving Consumer Goods), *Southern Metropolis Entertainment Weekly*, August 2013.

the public reading are largely concentrated on technical issues and result from their more detailed and segmented examination of foreign films. In a film synopsis published in 1979, the writer Ge Mei 葛美 recounted the story of the Mexican feature film *Yesenia*(1971). Mentioning one of the female characters Luisa, Ge Mei came up with a straightforward description of an innocent and gentle young girl.[37] However, Liu Guangning, who dubbed the character, in an article published in 1981, emphasized that presenting the character was about negotiating balances among traits such as willfulness and curiosity, arrogance and childlikeness, which were entirely different yet important in articulating the nuances of the character. [38] The voice actors were able to come up with more dimensions about the characters in the film and to assert a more authoritarian voice.

Moreover, when the audience' discussions on the foreign films always paid attention to the plot, the voice actors' reading about foreign films was largely focused on the characters they had dubbed. The detailed discussion by the voice actors and the character-centered reading distinguish their reading from the public and also alert us to the dubbing process in which the voice actors engaged with foreign films. The tactile qualities of viewing a film (such as mechanical manipulation including stop, start, rewind, fast forward, or freeze) are widely recognized in film studies as one of the essential factors in affecting reading. Rudolf Arnheim, for instance, in an essay titled "The Thoughts That Made the Picture Move" written in 1933 and included in his *Film as Art* (1957), stressed continuity of motion pictures is one of its

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[37] Mei Ge 葛美, "Moxige caise gushipian yesainiya" 墨西哥彩色故事片叶塞尼亚 (Mexican Color Feature Film *Yesenia*), *Movie Review,* May 1979, 22-23.

[38] Guangning Liu 刘广宁, "Tansuo yu tihui–yizhipian peiyin yishu qiantan" 探索与体会——译制片配音艺术浅谈(Exploration and Experience– a Discussion about Dubbing Art), *Film Art,* No. 9 (1981): 39-43.

distinguishing qualities: "the motion picture is not a synthetic agglomeration of individual images but based on a recording process that is as continuous and unitary as the movement of the photographed objects."[39] The mobile and continuous film is fundamentally different from static images produced by photography or in paintings. The totality of a film goes beyond the mere addition of individual pictures. The emphasis on the "continuity" of motion pictures highlights the impact of discontinuity on the work of the voice actors of foreign films.

To dub a film involved complex procedures for the group of voice actors. In order to generate high-quality products, the studio first divided each film into short segments that last only a few minutes, and then worked on the segments one-by-one. After figuring out meanings of film texts with professional translators and before formally beginning to dub, the voice actors also had to practice along with a person who specialized in lip synchronization. These procedures required the voice actors to read their assigned parts of work repeatedly and thus suspended the continuity of the motion pictures. Therefore, the differences between the reading of the voice actors and that of the public should be considered in terms of their different viewing conditions. Because the voice actors must intensively engage with and studiously study the texts, they tend to produce a more pointillist reading of the film, and notice the nuances in characters that are not detectable to one-time viewers.

Despite the minor differences, the readings between the voice actors and the public share similarities not only in terms of discussing the films' content but also in their emotional responses to the films. In the aforementioned article discussing Luisa in *Yesenia*, Ge Mei used a

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[39] Rudolf Arnheim, "The Thoughts That Made the Picture Move ", *Film As Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1957), 179–80.

string of adjectives– "innocent," "unsophisticated," "beautiful," "generous," "carefree". [40] Similarly, Liu Guangning used almost same words to depict the character in her article, calling Luisa an "innocent girl". [41] In like manner, this type of similarity can be seen in Tong Zirong's reading of *Zorro* (1975) and the public's reading. In the film, to avenge the death of his friend Miguel (Marino Masé), the protagonist Diego de la Vega (Alain Delon) is disguised as the military and civil governor of Nueva Aragón. At the same time, Diego creates his own alter ego Zorro to act to uphold justice after inspired by the folk tales of Zorro. To manage the two different identities of the character, Tong came up with a strategy by utilizing two pairs of shoes. When dubbing the bogus governor, he wore slippers because the person was "weak and useless"; in contrast, he wore heavy leather shoes when dubbing for Zorro, because he was "fearless and valiant." [42] The audience has echoed Tong's expressions and understandings of the character in the film. Since then, Zorro became the synonym for justice holder and fearless fighter in Chinese audience. Though in different social positions, the audience and the voice actors developed the same reservoir of vocabulary to describe their readings of foreign films. The linguistic similarity suggests that instead of being viewed as elite intellectuals who elevate and detach themselves from the public with their distinguished professional credentials, the voice actors are in fact part and parcel of the public who share subjectivities in reading the foreign films.

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[40] Mei Ge, "Moxige caise gushipian yesainiya", 22.

[41] Guangning Liu 刘广宁, "Tansuo yu tihui–yizhipian peiyin yishu qiantan", 43.

[42] Shanghai Dubbing Studio, Shanghai Dubbing Studio, "Tong Zirong: chimi peiyin" 童自荣：痴迷配音 (Tong Zirong: Dubbing Infatuation)，*The Charm of Voice* (Shanghai: Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2007), 93.

Moreover, we see the voice actors and the public were consonant in their emotional attitudes towards the foreign films, especially when compared with the official discourses–they both described the characters in an empathetic manner and chose to focus on the more humane and personal dimension of the films. A journal affiliated with Chinese Academy of Social Sciences also published an article on *Yesenia* in 1980. However, in contrast to the two film review articles on *Yesenia*, it asserted that the film demonstrated Mexican people's desire for independence and freedom and pictured the capitalist revolution in the 19th century.[43] Obviously, the voice actors' reading shared more concerns with the public than with the official discourses on the foreign films. Rather than actively imposing and maintaining official canons of taste, the voice actors were active agents of interpretation whose deliberations on the foreign films were interwoven with those of the public and at the same time, carried a more authoritative voice in their detailed description of film contents.

However, it would be ill-advised to claim that the similarities between the readings of the public and of the voice actors was due to the influence of voice actors' authoritative opinions on those of the public. Indeed, the voice actors exerted efforts to study the films, had more access to the media and thus, enjoyed more power in disseminating their opinions. While it was possible for them to inaugurate new ideas and dominate the public's views, the market force that determined their career and success nevertheless shaped their reading of foreign films. In *The Beautiful Voice*, a TV program that features interviews with the voice actors, almost all voice actors, when asked about what their favorite dubbed films were, chose to pick the ones that had

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[43] Congguo Wei 魏聪国, "Duju yige de moxige minzu dianying" 独具一格的墨西哥民族电影(Distinctive Mexican National Cinema), *Journal of Latin America* 拉丁美洲丛刊, January1980, 64.

enjoyed great popularity among the audience. Though the voice actors, unlike stage performers, did not directly face the audience, they never ceased to be aware that the audience were judging their performance and only identified with the elements that spoke to their desires. Walter Benjamin famously describes the experience of actors in face of the cinematic apparatus: "While he stands before the apparatus, the screen actor knows that in the end he is confronting the public, the consumers who constitute the market. This market, where he offers not only his labor but also his entire self, his heart and soul, is beyond his reach."[44] The distance the camera causes between the actors and the audience better situates the filmgoers to take on the role of critic. Therefore, with the audience ready to judge and critique, the voice actors' understanding, description, and preference of foreign films could never be free from the public influence. Thus, the reading of the voice actors should be viewed as the product of ongoing social process of interactions with the public and only has meaning when it establishes relations with the public opinions.

Dubbing the "Real"

Apart from sharing similar views towards the films or characters in the films, the voice actors and the public unanimously proclaimed that the voicing acting was "authentic" and "real" to the original films. Liu Guangning once said: "I believe dubbed films must stick to the principle of faithfulness. Voice actors should employ every means to be closer to the original

[44] Walter Benjamin, Howard Eiland, and Michael William Jennings. *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 261.

films. The highest goal of dubbing is to recover the color of the original films."[45] Likewise, commenting on the films Li Zi had dubbed, Su Xiu said: "Li Zi's dubbing is very apt. She is the old learned lady in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, the wild gipsy in *Yesenia*, and the countryside girl in *Oh! The Nomugi Pass*…In *Voice of Music,* when the original singing episode joins her dubbed dialogue, it is seamless."[46] It shows that in the views of the voice actors, any deviation from the original films or any attempt to be creative was deemed as undesirable, unprofessional and intolerable. The audience shares this obsession with "faithfulness". They attributed the reason why they became mesmerized with dubbed films and the voice actors to the excellent skills of the voice actors to return to the original. In an article analyzing the dubbing characteristics of various voice actors from Shanghai Dubbing Studio, the authors Meng Xiong 孟雄 and Ye Lin 叶琳 concluded that though the foreign films came from all over the world, the dubbed films successfully tallied with the originals thanks to the great efforts from the voice actors.[47]

However, dubbing, as a process of translation, is constantly subject to the influence of ideological factors and current aesthetics of a target society and should be taken as independent from the original texts. Translation constitutes the most distinct type of "rewritings" in André

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[45] Kai Bai 白皑, "Yishengchuanqing, yishengduoren" 以声传情，以声夺人 (Delivering Emotion and Attract People through Voice), *Popular Cinema* 大众电影, Vol. 2(1981).

[46] Xiu Su, "Wo peiyin shengya zhong de huoban", 20.

[47] Xiong Meng 孟雄 and Lin Ye 叶琳, "Chengji zhuozhu, geyou qianqiu–jianjie shangying yizhichang jiwei peiyinyuanyan de peiyintese"成绩卓著，各有千秋——简介上影译制厂几位配音演员的配音特色(Great Achievement with Distinction–a Brief Introduction about the Dubbing Distinctions of the Voice Actors from Shanghai Dubbing Studio), *Movie Review*, January 1983, 13.

Lefevere's terms. He suggests, "all rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way."[48] In the more relevant context of Occidentalism, which refers to a discursive practice that allows the Orient to participate in a process of local self-definition and self-appropriation by constructing its Western Other, even after being appropriated and constructed by Western Others, Xiaomei Chen comments "however Western these Chinese ideas may be in their origins, it is undeniable that their mere utterance in a non-western context inevitably creates a modification of their form and content."[49] Translation is inherently a process of change and it is imperative that we remain aware of the movement of differences involved. The independent position of reading and interpretation in the case of the voice actors allows us to detect a dubbing style unique to the specific social and cultural context of the late 1970s and early 1980s China.

The Shanghai Dubbing style of the voice actors features prominently in understanding the popularity of the dubbed films and stardom of the voice actors in the 1980s China. Foreign films have been imported into China since 1896. In the early years of Chinese film history, imports did not involve the question of translation, because most imported films were silent by the early 1930s and sound films in later years were screened in original production without translation. To facilitate the audience's understanding, some theaters distributed pamphlets of story synopsis, showed subtitles with slides, or employed interpreters to interpret on stage.

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[48] André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992), vii.

[49] Xiaomei Chen. *Occidentalism: A Theory Of Counter discourse In Post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 4.

Changchun Film Studio produced the first *official* translated film in 1949.[50] Since then to the 1980s, most foreign films screening in Chinese theaters were dubbed films, most of which had been translated by Shanghai Dubbing Studio and Changchun Film Studio. Though foreign films continued to be imported and translated into China since the end of 1950s, it was in the late 1970s and 1980s that they acquired nationwide popularity with the voice actors rising to prominence. Notably, it was also the time when Shanghai Dubbing studio began to overshadow Changchun Film Studio that was leading the industry of film translation in the 50s and 60s. In fact, a glance at the voice actors who were mentioned most frequently in media at that era were largely from Shanghai Dubbing Studio. What was special about Shanghai Dubbing Studio that made it rise to the top position of the industry in the late 1970s and 1980s?

In the foregoing interview with *Southern Metropolis Entertainment Weekly*, Shi Hang said that he believed the reason why Shanghai Dubbing Studio was more successful in that era was because the voice actors, who were mostly from Shanghai and surrounding provinces, were "elegant" in their natural disposition and also because of the Shanghai Dialect (or Shanghai-dialect-accented Mandarin) that formed the essential feature of dubbed films.[51] Indeed, "elegance" and Shanghai Dialect capture the most common characterization people make about dubbed films from Shanghai Dubbing Studio. Different from their Changchun colleagues who had a natural command of the official language Mandarin because Mandarin is based on the northern dialects of the country, the Shanghai voice actors utilized accented speech and elegant or rather ornate expressions in dubbed films, which has been marked as a unique Shanghai style. In

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[50] Early in 1948, some returned overseas Chinese made the first translated Italian film *Yiwunanwang* 一舞难忘 , which later was released in Shanghai Grande Theater.

[51] Hang Shi, "The evolution of Chinese Film Imports".

Manhunt, for instance, we see the voice actors using idioms and proverbs that were not common in daily colloquial Mandarin. In one of the well-known lines from the villain Dōtō Masayasu dubbed by Qiu Yuefeng, "keep walking and you will melt into the blue sky", the metaphorical phrase "melt into the sky" (*ronghua zai lantianli* 融化在蓝天里) was used, which is more of literary written Chinese than a spoken expression from a villain. Furthermore, in *Death on the Nile* (1978), exclamatory expressions such as "ah" "oh" precede almost every sentence uttered by the characters. The stylistic exaggeration contributes to the stylishness of the dubbing performance. The Shanghai accent is also discernable everywhere. Phonologically, Shanghai language has voiced stops, affricates, and fricatives, which are not existent in Mandarin but common in many Romance and Germanic languages. Therefore, when hearing the voices such as Tong Zirong in *Zorro* (1975), the Mandarin speaking audience naturally sensed the distinction and labeled it as exquisite, contrastive with plain Mandarin. The exquisite dubbing style was confirmed by the voice actors themselves, in expressing his gratitude to Su Xiu, the then director of dubbed films, Tong Zirong wrote: "I believe the biggest feature of my voice is its exquisiteness. [In the films assigned to me by Su Xiu], I successfully and thoroughly translated my exquisite timbre into playing the characters."[52] The exquisiteness of Shanghai dubbing performance mark it out from quotidian speech as well as the dubbed films from other eras.

It is through the analysis of the dubbing style that we come to understand the affective power dubbed films had over the audience and the prominence of the voice actors. The unique dubbing style gave the dubbed films a unique position in its relation with the audience. Tom

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[52] Zirong Tong, "Nihao, Su Xiu laoshi"你好!苏秀老师(Hello, Ms. Su Xiu), *Wenhui Bao,* Nov. 3, 2014.

Gunning sets up a distinction between a cinema of attractions and a narrative cinema. The cinema of attractions emphasizes presenting a series of disjointed and sometimes specular views, while the narrative cinema emphasizes storytelling. Based on earlier structuralist and semiotic distinctions between spectacle and narrative, Gunning's binary system adds a requirement of shock or astonishment to the spectacle side of the opposition.[53] However, the dubbed films blur the distinction. While most of the dubbed films are feature stories that are expected to absorb the audience into an illusion of the diegetic world, the exquisite dubbing style lines up with the cinema of attractions and offers spectacles that demand the audience' recognition of its extraordinariness and elicit their awe.

In this sense, the voice actors operated in line with the core of Bertolt Brecht's aesthetics – a realism that means not surface depiction but explanation of the structure of human reality. In the theater, understanding of reality begins with the spectator's awareness of the "unreality" of the staged events. The distancing effect caused by the exposure of the theatrical production's relationship to reality hinders the audience from simple identification with the characters in the play and solicits a more conscious response towards the characters in the film.[54] In the case of dubbed films, though the audience's reactions are rarely uniform, the estrangement experience introduced by the dubbing performance directs the audience's attention from uncritical emotions towards the film world to an evaluation and appreciation of the dubbing skills of the voice actors. At the same time, the ornate and exquisite dubbing style was considered as being "real" exactly because of its alienated relations with the reality, i.e. because it was presented not in real life, but

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[53] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8, nos. 3/4 (1986): 63–70.

[54] Bertolt Brecht, "On Chinese Acting", translated by Eric Bentley. *The Tulane Drama Review* 6.1 (1961): 130–136.

in movie theaters. Like Friedrich Kittler states in his book *Gramaphone, Film, Typewriter* (1999), new media is shaping human perception in the post-hermeneutic world. Gramophone, film, and typewriter, as technology to record manifestations of reality in absolute indifference to the concerns of man, presents the domain of the "real".[55] Media reflects the socio-political conditions of their possibility in their various forms of mediation.

Imagining the West

The stylistic exaggeration, which corresponds to the authenticity claims of the voice actors and the audience, is justified not only by the aesthetics of Brechitian realism but also by the cultural context that gave birth to the style. As Mark Nornes suggests that the so-called "authenticity" and "realness" often associated with the dubbing process, is codified and bound to limits set by the demands of the final marketplace.[56] In other words, the "realness" that regulated the dubbing performance was not necessarily an investment in reality, but a response to the craving of the audience and an embodiment and reiteration of social norms. The voice actors' insistence in delivering a "real" performance and the viewers' commendation of the voice actors' exquisite yet "real" dubbing style were reflections of their own expectations about foreign films and socially normalized imagination about the foreign.

Most of the voice actors who asserted that their dubbing was authentic had never been abroad. They had varied foreign language skills, but largely could not speak foreign languages

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[55] Friedrich Kittler. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter.* Translated with an Introduction by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

[56] Abe Mark Nornes. *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 195.

well and had to depend on translators to understand the films in the preliminary step of dubbing process. In an interview, Qiao Zhen was asked how the voice actors could understand the films without any living abroad experience. Qiao said: "I understand it from my own life experience and the impression the films give me. It would be better if I have more knowledge about the foreign customs and language expressions, but unfortunately I have only been abroad once, spending ten days in traveling five countries and gaining only cursory observation."[57] Apart from their limited command of cultural and linguistic knowledge about other countries, their understanding of the foreign films was further circumscribed by more practical factors such as the material shortage or official thwarts. However earnestly they expressed their desire to learn foreign culture and improve their understanding, they could not even get a full picture of the films they worked with. Usually, the voice actors worked only with a single film copy and a script given by China Film Corporation. Little information about the director, playwright and actors were clear when they took the assignment and sometimes, even the script was incomplete.[58] Their requests to access more films were deemed as unnecessary and never approved by the officials.

The minimal firsthand experience with the foreign, however, did not prevent the voice actors, along with the audience, from imagining a foreign world that fits their expectations. In the best known single work in nationalism studies *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991), Benedict Anderson claims that any community beyond face-

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[57] Wang Zhi 王志, Qiao Zhen 乔榛 and Ding Jianhua 丁建华. "Shengyin de chuantongli yu hun de zai suzao", 34.

[58]Yufeng Sun 孙渝烽 and Lei Cao 曹雷, "Women de yuanwang"我们的愿望 (Our Wishes), *Movie Communication*, July 1984, 26.

to-face interaction must be imagined.[59] While his major concern is how political identity is constructed through print capitalism, the theoretical insight of "the imagined community" could be borrowed into the cinematic representation. In other words, the Andersonian template of a print-based "imagined community" suggests a possibility that like print culture, cinema could be an optimal machine to project an idealized collective self-image of a unified national body. Film theorists such as Nataša Ďurovičová claim that the cinematic projection asserts itself clearly with the standardization of synchronized sound coinciding with national borders.[60] While they all emphasize on the representational and projectional function of domestic cinema, especially sound cinema, in shaping people's perception of nationhood, translated cinema can participate in conjuring up a foreign image in the local reception. In the context of the 1970s and 1980s China, the audience and voice actors perceive and imagine the outside world, or more specifically, the West, through dubbed films.

The late 1970s and 1980s China witnessed a break from the trauma of the past Cultural Revolution, a shift to the present era of reform, and a blueprint for building a better future. The country began to distance itself from Maoist revolutionary discourse and looked to the West as a model they could imitate or transcend to build a prosperous society. Intellectuals enthusiastically translated Western literature and cultural theories into China, borrowed from Western modernism to bolster their authority in debunking the Maoist ideology, and pursued an alternative Chinese modernity characterized by a combination of Chinese nationalism and

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[59] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections On the Origin and Spread Of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 50.

[60] Ďurovičová, Natasa. "Vector, Flow, Zone: Towards a History of Cinematic Translation," *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, eds. Natasa Ďurovičová and Kathleen E. Newman (New York: Routledge, 2010), 91.

cosmopolitanism.[61] Setting against the social, political, and cultural contexts that were more oriented to the world, primarily the West, film imports into China in the late 1970s and 1980s saw unprecedented diversity. In terms of country origins, in addition to films from Soviet Union, Romania, and North Korea, which dominated Chinese film market in the 1950s and 1960s, films from Western countries, especially Japan, the U.S., and France flooded in and became top choices among Chinese audiences. The West, thus, became the place with which the Chinese people loaded their imagination.

Surely some of this patina of "exquisite" dubbing style dates back to the "softness" of Jiangnan opera traditions. It also has the added layer of Shanghai as the center for Western-style sophistication. Shanghai has been the most cosmopolitan city in China since the treaty-port times. Its vitality and robust international flavor can be seen from its Western-style architectures, culinary landmarks of European origin, and nightlife scenes. The heritage of colonial past and the opening up of reform present handed Shanghai a tie to the privileged West. Shanghai, therefore, became the best place that could produce a foreign dubbing style and hold the imagination.

In fact, the fascination over Western elements was so intense that any deviation from the West risked being rejected by the Chinese audience. In examining the post-Maoist theater, Xiaomei Chen finds that Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town* failed to attract a significant Chinese audience. On one hand, the play was "partially Chinese" in that it was close to Chinese theatrical conventions under the profound influence of Mei Lanfang's performance. More importantly, it

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[61] Mayfair Mei-hui Yang. "Mass Media and Transnational Subjectivity in Shanghai: Notes on (Re)Cosmopolitanism in a Chinese Metropolis". eds. Aihwa Ong, Donald Nonini. *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 288.

came relatively late in Chinese theaters when audience had already been flooded with Western plays. "*Our Town* arrived at the wrong time in the wrong place, when things 'Chinese' had been overtaken by numerous things 'Western'…wherever one looked, the horizons of Chinese literary history and dramatic expectations seemed drastically affected by things non-Chinese."[62] The great number of foreign plays in market had made *Our Town*'s Chineseness too familiar to appeal. Similarly, in the market of dubbed films where the Chinese audience expected to see the "authentic" foreign films, the exquisite and elegant Shanghai dubbing style was foreign enough to speak to their imagination about the West and precipitate the prominence of dubbed films.

Rising to Stardom

The voice actors who produced the "elegant" dubbing style rose to stardom and became subjects of identification in the specific cultural orientation towards the West. The term "identification" has been central to many debates within psychoanalytic theory and film studies. Within psychoanalytic theory, identification has been the key mechanisms through which the self is constituted in relation to external objects. Most notably, the role of vision takes a center role in Lacan's theories of the mirror stage, through which subjects are "constituted through a specular misrecognition of an other."[63] These modes of identification within psychoanalysis have been perceived by many film theorists such as Christian Metz as analogous to the cinematic experience of spectatorship. More generally, the term "identification" refers to a process of

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[62] Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism,* 133.

[63] S. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,* 1921, chapter 7, quoted in Anne Friedberg, "Identification and the Star: a Refusal of Difference", in *Star Signs: Papers from a Weekend Workshop*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: BFI Publishing, 1982).

engagement with a character. In relation with the idea of "point of view", it involves a visual point of view, it has often used to mean watching the film from a character's point of view, not only involving the visual point of view, but also constructed by frame of shot, editing, narrative, and so on. However, the case of voice actors suggests an alternative to the visual emphasis of identification proposed by these theorists. The process of negotiating the boundaries between the self and other takes on a significance in the context of the popular cinema in 1980s China where the audience was offered idealized voices.

After *Zorro* was released in 1980, Tong Zirong became a synonym of prince. One fan once described the voice of Tong Zirong, "Every time I hear his voice, I feel like I enter the foreign films in the 80s, and see a chivalrous knight with a sabre in his hand standing in front of me."[64] The identity of the audience member is seldom referred to in this description. The type of identification with the voice of Tong indicates that the star was perceived as different and unattainable. This kind of worship of the stars is reminiscent of the denial of the self in some religious devotion. In fact, it is the otherness embodied in the voice actor that the audience chose to remember and take pleasure in.

More precisely, it is the contradictory combination of the otherness and the self represented by the voice actors that have solicited identification from the audience. In his classic study of movie stars and stardom *Heavenly bodies: Film Stars and Society* (2004[1986]), Richard Dyer argues that the stars embody ideological contradictions that are indissolubly fused and make them more visible, suggesting that their charisma can be traced to the values felt to be

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[64] Chunfeng Zhang 张春风, "Tong Zirong: yongyuan de wangzi" 童自荣：永远的王子 (Tong Zirong: The Eternal Prince), *68 Characters that Move Farmers* 感动农民的 68 个人物, eds, Fangyou Sun and Gang Teng(Shanghai: East China Normal University Press), 35-38.

under threat or in flux at a particular moment in time.[65] The notion of "star image" is the central idea Dyer uses to capture the multiple social meanings and contradictions underneath stardom in his study. He writes: "a star image is made out of media texts that can be grouped together as promotion, publicity, films and criticism and commentaries."[66] To understand a star image, not only the studio-produced promotional material such as trailers, posters, but also the publicity material such as press and broadcast interviews, gossip columns, and magazine articles, should be looked at.

The oxymoronic star image that addresses contradictory ideals can be discerned in two layers in the case of the voice actors. The first contradiction is found in their unique dubbing style, which represents space between the foreign and domestic, the official and unofficial. Countries usually opt for dubbing out of economic or nationalist concerns. Because dubbing is much more expensive, countries with bigger scale of economy are more likely to choose dub rather than subtitle a film. But another major concern is the nationalism. In blocking out the sound of foreign tongues, dubbing preserves cultural and linguistic insularity and reinforces a sense of national identity and autonomy for the country. However, the voice actors in the 1970s and 1980s seemed to counteract the supposed nationalist function of dubbed films. Instead of "homing" people in a familiar linguistic environment, they adopted a manifestly foreign dubbing style that won recognition among the West-oriented audience. The contradiction demonstrated by the dubbing style constitutes the first layer of the audience's identification with the voice actors.

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[65] Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: Routledge, 2011), 6.

[66] Ibid., 60.

The stars do not produce their image single-handedly; rather, the media heavily factor in the production. The star texts circulated in media leads to the second layer of contradiction that is essential to understand the voice actors' stardom. Before I move on to examine the subsidiary star texts of the voice actors circulated in the media, it is necessary to recognize the nation's economic reform and transition in the late 1970s and 1980s China that have made the media publicity and celebrity culture possible. The nation's move towards a market-based economy is vital to the popularity of the voice actors in the 1980s. In *Celebrity in China* (2010), Louise Edwards and Elaine Jeffreys identify the specific yet important moves of the nation towards "market socialism" in the evolution of a celebrity culture in China. The widespread increase in personal income following the adoption of a market-based economy gave rise to a consumer society that thirsted for entertainment; rapid urbanization and integration of the country into global community contributed to popular culture phenomena such as commercial advertising; and moreover, the state control over the media gradually relaxed and mass media industries experienced growth. As a result, nonpolitical information, soft news, and entertainment including celebrity stories have proliferated in media to attract audience and earn profits. Though the expanding consumer society remained infused with a socialist consciousness and public figures were still celebrated for their heroic deeds to serve the nation and advance socialism, the 1980s has produced new forms of consumption of celebrity, which were less constructed by political intervention, and were more based on consumer aesthetics and media mediation.[67]

Many commentators of celebrity studies suggest that contemporary stars achieve their fame primarily through the media mediated discourses of their lifestyle and personality, rather

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[67] Elaine Jeffreys and Louise Edwards, "Celebrity/China", *Celebrity in China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 3.

than through talent or great accomplishments.[68] Though the mass media-mediated fame is generally deplored as undeserving of public attention, the observation points to the central threshold of stardom ascribed by film historians, that is, a public figure becomes a celebrity "when media interest in their activities is transferred from reporting on their public role (such as their specific achievement in politics or sport) to investigating the details of their personality and private lives."[69] Therefore, though unlike many contemporary stars, the fame the voice actors achieved in the 1980s was more based on their dubbing skills than mediated process, the media circulation of material referring to the voice actors' personal life beyond their profession factored in their stardom. An examination of the meaning of the identities of the voice actors provides insights into how the media site was instrumental in producing contradictory star images and functioned in constructing their celebrity status.

In an interview with Ding Jianhua published in 1986, Shan Minkang 单敏康 detailed how the voice actor was born in a poor family yet achieved success through her own efforts. In the story, to master Mandarin, Ding asked her mother to buy her some picture books, because she believed it was important to practice the ability to relate stories through pictures. However, she was the eldest daughter of this poor family and could not even afford to wear new clothes, let alone new books. This request would cost too much. Luckily, her loving mother knew Ding Jianhua was a sensible child who would not make request without consideration. Therefore, her mother first borrowed some books for her daughter and after earning some money through ginning cotton, she finally bought Ding the picture books. Deeply moved, Ding worked even

[68] S. Redmond and S. Holmes, *Stardom and Celebrity* (London: Sage, 2007), 8.

[69] G. Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (London: Sage, 2004), 8.

harder and finally won the second-level prize in the Mandarin Competition of Shanghai Primary School Students in her fourth grade and the first-level prize when she was in the fifth year.[70]

In the story, the voice actor was admired not for her specialized dubbing skills, but for her attributes such as perseverance, academic achievement, and thrift, which were believed to be direct reasons why she acquired the skills and eventually became successful. Similarly, a published interview with Qiao Zhen in 1981 was also full of descriptions about the voice actor' academic talent, resilience, and even public propriety: "he won the first place of the whole school in reciting when he was in the third grade in primary school"; "with a sincere and kind smile, he speaks to us in a slowly and unhurriedly manner."[71] These attributes of the stars were seen as reflections of their personalities, which are the essential reason of their success.

The star images circulated in the studio promotion articles, newspaper, and TV shows all emphasized on the moral virtues of the actors, sending the message that the actors were hard working people from poor background and as long as you work hard, you would be as successful as them. This combination of the poor background and entrepreneurship formed the convention in Chinese media culture. As Elaine Jeffreys and Louise Edwards suggest, Chinese culture seemed to be preoccupied with moral virtue of prominent individuals, and non-conformist and

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[70] Minkang Shan 单敏康, "Yaer zainongchang zhekuai tudishang yunyu–fang zhuming yanyuan dingjianhua" " 芽儿" 在农场 这块土地上孕育 ——访著名配音演员丁建华 (Bud Sprouts in this Field–an Interview with the Voice Actor Ding Jianhua), *China State Farms* 中国农垦, 05 (1986): 40.

[71] Zhen Da 达政 and Wei Zhang 张炜, "Fang Qingnian peiyin yanyuan Qiao Zhen" 访青年配音演员乔榛(An Interview With Youth Voice Actor Qiao Zhen), *Movie Review*, No.4 (1981): 22. 22-23.

immorality often generates notoriety.[72] The good deeds, manners, and even approachable personalities of the voice actors, as conformity to the norm, encourage the public admiration and identification.

This emphasis on poor family background and hard work of stars results from the double influence of the socialist past and the reform present. The poor family background is reminiscent of the stereotypical "poor peasants" image promulgated by Mao Zedong in his class analysis since 1920s throughout the Cultural Revolution period. In Mao's scenario, the poor peasants with the least means are the most revolutionary forces in face of national movement. Thus, a person born in poverty is seen to be inherently virtuous, compared with those who were born in rich families. By emphasizing on the humble family background of the stars, the media speaks to the socialist class values that still linger in Chinese society in the immediate post-Mao era. However, while Mao uses class to instigate antagonism between classes and make revolution, the reforms in the late 1970s introduce the possibility that the class stratification is not a wall that segregates people, but a ladder people can clamber up. Subsequently, the lowborn status is integrated into a "rags to riches" narrative that is representative of the neoliberal ideology and the trait of hard work becomes glorified as an economic and social guarantee of a successful livelihood. Therefore, embedded within the flux of the multivocality of meanings in the 1980s China, the star images of the voice actors demonstrate a contradictory combination of socialist residue and capitalist ideology.

The voice actors are the flesh and blood persons who embody the contradictory values of the East and West, past and present. Every published article in media and each articulation of the

[72] Elaine Jeffreys and Louise Edwards, *Celebrity in China,* 19.

voice in the dubbed films reinforce the star image and serve as sites where the audience establishes the basis for their identification. The stardom of the voice actors speaks to the typical ways of behaving, feeling and thinking in the late 1970s and early 1980s Chinese society.

Conclusion

Theorizing the voice actors as an interpretative community and juxtaposing their reading with the official and public discourses prove fruitful. Though popular culture has been viewed as the most ideological compared with other types of cultures, we still manage to find subversive elements underneath the monolith. In relations with the official, the reading of the voice actors was intimately related with their identities as the state-employees. The voice actors' experience of working at the state-owned enterprises in the late 1970s and early 1980s was unfolded in two dimensions. For one thing, the voice actors were charged with the essential task of advocating the official line of the Chinese Communist Party and carrying out propagandistic agenda of the Party-state. For another, as an enterprise, the dubbing studio had to take into consideration its economic profits and to expect more works assigned by the China Film Corporation so it could maintain the business and the voice actors could feed themselves and families. Despite all the political and economic pressure, the voice actors sought to negotiate a limited borderland where they can assert a measure of agency in reading the foreign films, rather than mindlessly execute top-down orders and conduct self-censorship. They demonstrated their cultural agency through refusing to interpret the films in line with the official narrative, infusing their empathy and passion into their dubbing performance, and in some cases, standing up to offer direct suggestions to the officials. To a large extent, the both supportive and subversive roles of the voice actors with regard to the prevailing political agendas were inflection of the two often-conflicting goals of political survival and artistic commitment in many Chinese artists in the 70s and 80s China, which is also a claim that continues to hold water in contemporary Chinese society.

In contrast to the divergent position with the official, the voice actors' path shows more of a tendency to converge with the public's path. They unanimously asserted their empathy towards the characters in the films and claimed the dubbing performance authentically recovered the color of the original foreign films. These readings of the foreign films found their roots in the cultural context of early post-Maoist China when Chinese people turned to Western philosophies and thinking to distance themselves from the revolutionary discourses. Dubbed films that were imported primarily from the West, and featured an exquisitely foreign dubbing style couched in the native Chinese language by the voice actors, became instrumental in sparking off an imagination towards the West. The voice actors' marked portrayal of characters in the foreign films matched the imagination of the audience and raised them to stardom.

The market mechanism and the mediating effect of media also played important roles in the 80s Chinese celebrity culture where the audience identified with the voice actors as persons of great perseverance and moral integrity. The emphasis not only shows a specific celebrity culture that attaches great importance to moral virtue, but also demonstrates the voice actors' ordinariness in contrast to their extraordinary dubbing style. The culturally acclaimed poise and manner of the voice actors in the media beyond the dubbed films managed to enhance their popularity.

To a large extent, the reading of the voice actors, whether demonstrated through their performance or their published articles, is a result of multiple agents involved in the dubbing production process. Voice actors are only the most visible elements of dubbing. To dub films, however, demands close cooperation between voice actors, translators, directors, sound editors, and technicians with specialized skills. Martin Shingler emphasized in painstaking detail that the

production of a voice on film involves a group of people in complex process coordinating the voice:

> The production of a voice on film necessarily involves a group of people with expertise in recording as well as the technology that makes recording possible. While the script presents actors within some clear constraints, they are still required to work out what kind of voice their character should use when speaking. This can involve actors making a choice between any number of possible variables, such as accent, pitch, rhythm, pace, volume, modulation, timbre, intonation, grain, resonance, of dry or moist mouth, of the positioning of teeth, tongue and lips, of the muscles around the lips and cheeks, of how much breath is used to energize the words, of what sighs, murmurs and other inarticulate or paralinguistic noises to punctuate the words of the script, often this will include some negotiation within what a co-actor is doing with other voice, an actor being required to either match or differentiate the voice from that of heir colleague. None of this is straightforward, nor is it clearly set out in a script. This constitutes part of the work and autonomy an actor, although it ordinarily involves collaboration with fellow members of the cast and crew.[73]

Indeed, the film cast and crew all played a role in producing the star voice in the dubbed films in the 1980s China and thus, were all caught up in the complex socio-economic forces that organized the mass consumption of foreign films in the early Post-Maoist period, with the voice actors only representing the most salient part.

The popularity of dubbed films and voice actors existed as part of a cultural dynamics that deeply affected a nation and the everyday life of its people in that particular era, which seems unrepeatable in the present era. The dubbing industry gradually ceases to attain popular appeal and is more often labeled as enervated with the only exception in animation. Lack of talents and efforts, globalization and easier access to foreign films, and enhanced education level among the masses are all the factors exacerbating its decline. Despite the gloomy prospect of the dubbing industry, the dubbed films and voice actors from the late 1970s and 1980s continue to

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[73] Martin Shingler, *Star Studies: A Critical Guide* (London: BFI, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 234.

have striking cultural reverberation over the Chinese society. Hong Kong director John Woo is remaking the Japanese film *Manhunt*, which is scheduled to release in spring 2018. At the start of the 2017 Chinese New Year, the highly rated TV program *Readers* hosted by Dong Qing invited Qiao Zhen to share stories of his life as a voice actor. Indeed, dubbed films from that era are lodged in personal memories and nostalgia for a bygone past among vast numbers of individuals, and continue to insinuate itself in the form of commercial culture, star culture, and the cyber sphere to give popular appeal. The recurring presence of their traces nevertheless assures that the present study and further exploration are as necessary as important.

If reading varies spatially and temporally, in an effort to reconstruct culture, it would be necessary to connect particular texts with communities that produce and consume them, and to make efforts to specify how the individuals involved actually construct those texts as meaningful structures. The study shows the voice actors can no longer be simply dismissed as mindlessly executing a top-down order in a totalitarian regime characterized by censorship and suppression of free expression, or as solely mirroring a craving of the film public. Instead, it can be studied as a complex and dialectical process in which multiple voices and opposing views collide, negotiate, and compromise to form what looks like a mainstream ideology–and indeed functions as such–to legitimize the powerful state and its right to rule, as well as cracking open space that suggests creativity.

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